DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 634 SP 028 051

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TITLE Human Sensitivity Enhances Student Retention in Higher Education.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Persistence; *College Students; Dropouts; *Economically Disadvantaged; Helping Relationship; Higher Education; *Minority Groups; *Psychological Needs; Sensitivity Training; *Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

This study explored the affective needs of minority and economically disadvantaged college students enrolled in developmental education courses in various universities in Louisiana, Alabama, and Texas. Three hundred and fifty-seven responses were received from a survey questionnaire seeking information on why these students were entering postsecondary institutions, reasons for decrease in motivational level, and factors that would encourage remaining in school. Personal information was also solicited. Results indicated a need for college professors to develop improved levels of sensitivity toward students' emotional needs as well as academic needs. Suggestions are made on curriculum, and a "Helping Skills Inventory" for college professors is outlined. An item-by-item interpretation of responses to the questionnaire is presented. The survey questionnaire is appended. (JD)

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HUMAN SENSITIVITY ENHANCES STUDENT RETENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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HUMAN SENSITIVITY ENHANCES
STUDENT RETENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The increasing university dropout rate for minority students is a devastating problem throughout the United States of America. This issue is of concern to professionals in all areas of the educational arena, because it has an influence on the development of American population. In order to find a solution for the problem, it will require the united effort of the educational, political and economical sectors of this country to join forces in addressing the factors causing this problem.

This research project was conducted by McNeese State University's three hundred and fifty-seven College of Education in the fall of 1985. College students were surveyed from three states: Louisiana, Alabama and Texas. A copy of the questionaire (appendix I), was sent to minority students enrolled in the developmental education courses in various universities throughout the states included in the study. The response was remarkable. Students were surveyed with a return of three hundred and fifty-seven (357) questionaires.

The results of this study indicates the overwhelming evidences of a need for college professors to develop an improved level of sensitivity toward students' emotional needs as well as academic needs. There is a need for the educational system to prepare faculty in higher education strategies to deal effectively with the dropout problem by providing information on the significance of meeting students emotional needs as well as intellectual needs.

If college professors are expected to assume the responsibility of providing the incentive for students to aspire earning a college degree, it is essential that the element of human sensitivity be included, emphasized and practiced in college-level courses.

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HUMAN SENSITIVITY ENHANCES STUDENT RETENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The University has a responsibility to all students in terms of providing an opportunity to receive the educational training needed to participate more effectively in the intellectual, economic, social, political and cultural diversity of this society.

This is the basic mission of all institutions of higher education in the United States. However, there is a missing ingredient, the statement referring to the emotional support, the humanistic element, and the motivation needed for economically disadvantaged college students.

A larger percentage of the freshmen students on college campuses are experiencing for the first time in their lives the responsibility of time management, the obligation of independent decision making, and suffering the consequences. All college students are suppose to have developed those skills prior to entering the institution of higher education. Unfortunately, research indicates that less than 50% of the first-semester entering freshmen will graduate within the given four years of their college experience. Something is happening that causes the students to drop out. It maybe academic, intellectual, or emotional. Nevertheless, the students forfeit their opportunity for a successful educational experience, even before it starts.

There is an unanswered question about whether or not a student from an economically disadvantaged background is receiving the same educational opportunity as that of the student from a financially stable background; who

from birth was motivated and conditioned to aspire a college education.

Lets analyze both situations briefly. The disadvantaged student is treated equal to other students. However, often he has major barriers to over come before being able to utilize this given opportunity. The simple task of taking standards tests (ACT) or (SAT) may cause such anxiety that the scores are totally invalid. According to Dr. Hain Ginnott, a student's high anxiety level is responsible for the majority of the low scores of disadvantaged students on standard tests. This students does not have a network consisting of people in the immediate family to rely on for advice and suggestions. This student does not fit the cliche, "It is not what you know, but who you know."

Therefore, often the disadvantaged student must follow all the rules in the book and the other student is the recipient of all the exceptions.

It is the responsibility of the university, faculty and staff to supplement the existing curriculum by Human Sensitivity to Enhance Student Retention, and by utilizing the following:

1. Honesty that a student may trust and place his confidence in, for support, caring, and compassion.

2. Help students to celebrate their success, although as small as an improvement of a grade by one level up from a "D" to a "C". Your enthusiasm reflects positive expectation in the student's ability to succeed.

3. Always remain loyal to the students even when you realize it may not be his best interest. Disadvantaged students need someone in the institution to rely on.

4. The element of being a positive person is essential for an individual to function effectively in a helping profession such as an institution of higher education.

5. Helpers are always concerned about the success of the total student. This concern is reflected in the individual's interest, not only in the student's academic success, but in the student's emotional stability as well.

6. Nourishing may seem elementary and inappropriate for students in higher education, nevertheless, research shows that the highest rate of suicide victims are between the ages of 17-25. This indicates that many college students still have adaptation problems which they cannot deal with effectively.

The last four but not least are intertwined as the links of a chain, for when an individual is genuine he is automatically friendly to his fellowmen. He is always striving to understand the uniqueness of human beings. Thus, that individual has unconditional love for every student in the institution of higher education.

DIAGRAM A

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION ON ALLEVIATION OF MINORITY
STUDENT RETRENCHMENT IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

HELPING SKILLS INVENTORY

Helping Skills Inventory is designed to improve the intrapersonal relationship of Student Service personnel and Students at the University level.

HELPING SKILLS INVENTORY

To what extent does each of the following fit as a description of your helping method. (Circle one number in each line across)

		Always	Very Often	Often	Some-times	Never
1.	I incite enthusiasm in college life by being enthusiastic.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I inspire students to achieve their goals by encouraging them to work toward developing positive self concept and self confidence.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I instigate a rebellion against apathy.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I have established and accepting atmosphere in my office that is conducive to learning.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I recognize and respect all students for their success at the University.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I offer emotional support for all students.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I provide information about other services available at my institution, without being asked by the student.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I encourage students to set long-term goals and strive to avhieve them.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I help students to deal with construc-tive criticism and benefit from it.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I help students to understand that a negative attitude produces a negative perception that may become a danger to success in higher education.	1	2	3	4	5

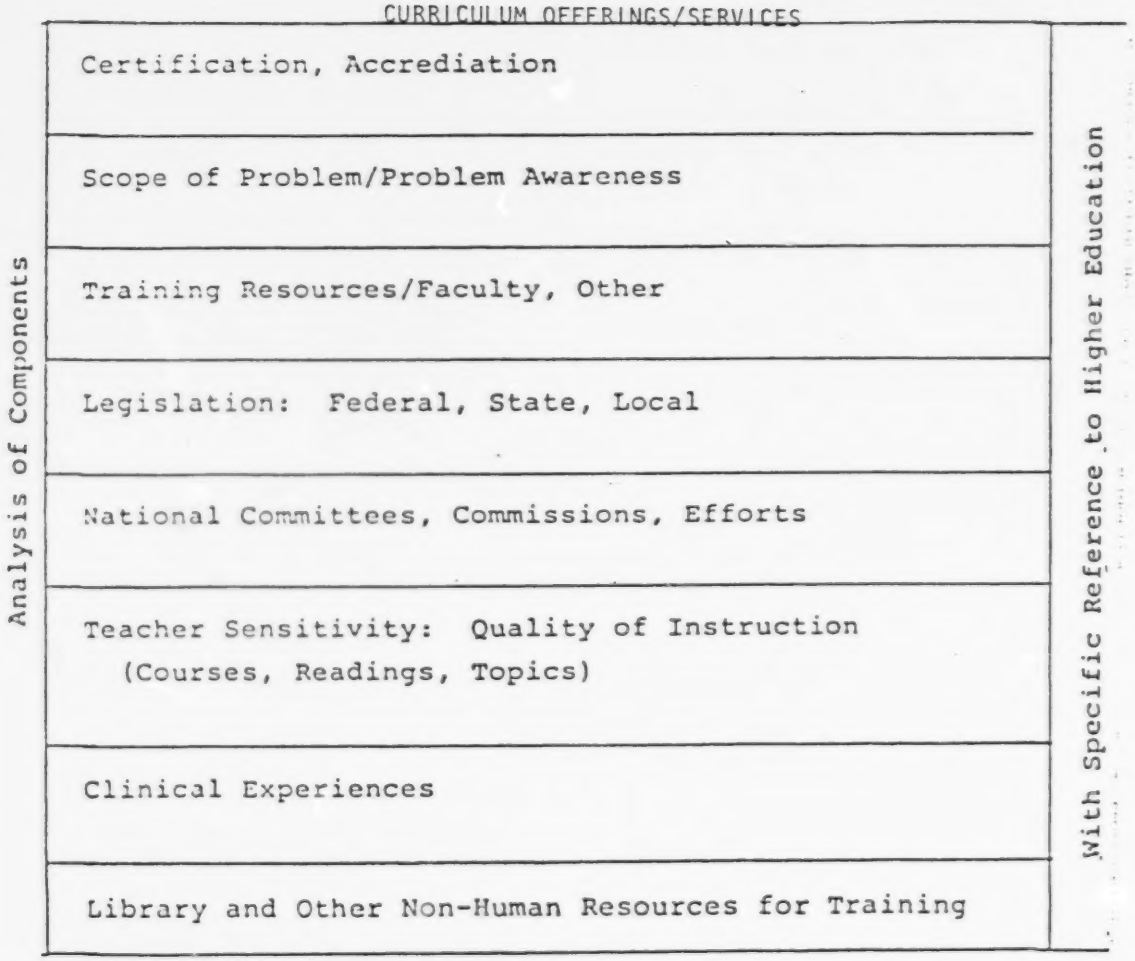

DIAGRAM A

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION ON ALLEVIATION OF MINORITY
STUDENT RETRENCHMENT IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

		Always	Very Often	Often	Some-times	Never
11.	I always do the talking when we communicate.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Sometimes I say one thing and "my facial" expressions say something different.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I listen to students with interest in what they are saying by giving total attention.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I treat students as human beings with important feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I expect all students in my program to be successful in their academic courses.	1	2	3	4	5

Item I of the questionaire provided a blank for indication of the sex of the sex of the subject. Item II asked for the age. Item III provided five categories for marital status. Item IV provided a blank for either High School Diploma or a GED. Item V asked for the parent's (both mother's and father's) educational level. Item VI provided eleven (11) categories for how the education was financed. Item VII provided blanks for first the college major and second whether the degree was a Bachelor's or Associate. Item VIII provided sixteen (16) reasons for entering a postsecondary institution. Item IX provided fifteen (15) factors that would encourage the subject to remain in school and attain a degree. Item X provided a blank for how many times the subject had changed curriculums. Item XI provided two blanks asking the questions: How many times the subject had been on Academic Probation or Academic Suspension. Item XII asked how many credit hours the subject was pursuing this semester. And lastly, item XIII asked if the subject was taking or had the subject taken any developmental courses.

RESULTS

1) Sex: Male 158 Female 199

Response	Number	Percentage
Male	158	44%
Female	199	56%
TOTAL	357	100%

Table I indicated the number of male and female subjects who responded to the questionaire. One hundred and fifty-eight (44%) of the participants who responded are males and one hundred and ninety-nine (56%) are females.

2) Age (Range)

Response	Number	Percentage
Ages 15-44	357	100

Table II, Question II shows the age range of the participants. Three hundred and fifty-seven (100%) of the participants ranged from 15-44 years of age.

3) Marital Status

Response	Number	Percentage
Married	35	10%
Separated	9	3%
Single	305	85%
Divorced	7	2%
Widow/Widower	1	0%
TOTAL	357	100%

Table III, Question III shows the marital status of the three hundred and fifty-seven participants surveyed. Thirty-five (10%) were married while nine (3%) were separated. Three hundred and five (85%) were single, seven (2%) were divorced, and one was widowed.

4) Table IV, Question IV shows whether they received a High School Diploma or a GED.

Response	Number	Percentage
High School	251	95%
GED	14	5%
TOTAL	265	100%

Table V, Question V shows the educational level of both parents.

5) Parent's Educational Level

Response	Number	Percentage
Mother	0 thru College	100%
Father	0 thru College	100%

6) Table VI shows how the subject's education was financed.

Response	Number	Percentage
Self-employment	35	13%
Parents	83	31%
CWS	5	2%
Pell Grant	103	39%
SEOG	0	0%
SS	0	0%
Scholarships	20	8%
Vocational Rehabilitation	2	1%
Other	17	6%
TOTAL	265	100%

7) Table VII, Question related to college majors which indicated a wide range from Medical Technology to Education. It also accounted for two different levels of degrees: Bachelors and Associates.

Response	Number	Percentage
Bachelor's	141	77%
Associates	42	23%
TOTAL	183	100%

8) Table VIII, Question VIII gives reasons for entering a Postsecondary Institution.

Response	Number	Percentage
1-To earn a degree	231	30%
2-To be with friends	28	4%
3-Pressure from parents	24	3%
4-Pressure from society	8	1%
5-Time is running out and a need to do something with life	50	6%
6-Unemployment	35	4%
7-For retraining	9	1%
8-Socialization	23	3%
9-Bored	12	2%
10-Career Opportunity (R.O.T.C., National Guard, etc.)	86	11%
11-Personal Education	77	10%
12-Improve work skills	77	10%
13-Improve marketable skills	33	3%
14-Advancement in existing position	19	2%
15-Acquire independence	65	8%
16-Vocational Rehabilitation	6	1%
TOTAL	783	100%

Table IX, Question IX lists fifteen (15) factors that would encourage the subject to remain in school and attain a degree.

Response	Number	Percentage
1-Relevant Courses	47	7%
2-Individualized Instruction	32	5%
3-Student Input in Curriculum	30	5%
4-Better Teacher-Student Rapport	64	10%
5-Effective Counseling	39	6%
6-Adequate Finances	72	11%
7-Adequate Intellectual Challenge	17	3%
8-Caring Attitude of Faculty and Staff	72	11%
9-Less Restrictive Rules and Regulations	57	9%
10-Tutoring Program	63	10%
11-More Study Sessions Made Available by Instructors	52	8%
13-More Socialization	29	4%
14-Appropriate Peer-Interaction	10	2%
15-Quality Teaching	59	9%
TOTAL	661	100%

Table IX, Question IX shows the factors that may have encouraged the participants to remain in school and attain their degree. Forty-seven (7 %) believe that courses should have been more relevant. Thirty-two (5 %) thought the instruction should have been more individualized. Thirty (5 %) felt there should have been more student input while sixty-four (10 %) thought teacher-student rapport should be stressed even more. It was cited that thirty-nine (6 %) felt that effective counseling was the key while seventy-two (11%) which represents most who felt that a caring attitude on the part of the faculty and staff was needed most. Fifty-seven (9 %) thought that there should be less restrictive rules and regulations. Sixty-three (10 %) needed the tutoring program, while more study sessions made available by instructors

by instructors was fifty-two (8%). More socialization was felt to be needed by twenty-nine (4%). Appropriate peer-interaction was cited by ten (2%) of the participants and quality teaching was felt by fifty-nine (9%) to be needed.

10) Question X asks how many times the student's curriculum had been changed and a response of thirty-one (3%) came as a response.

11) Question XI asks the student how many times he had been on academic probation.

Response	Number	Percentage
Academic Probation	13	4%
Academic Suspension	5	1%
TOTAL	18	5%

12) Question XI asks the student how many credit hours were being pursued this semester and the answers ranged from nine (3%) to twenty (6%).

13) Lastly, Question XIII asks if the student was taking or had taken any developmental courses and the response was one hundred and thirty-six (38%).

DISCUSSION

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn about the factors that contribute to Student Retention in Higher Education.

1) The majority of the participants were females.

2) There is a broad range in the ages of the persons (15-44 years old) who indicated that they have realized that higher education is needed to gain employment.

3) A large percentage of the students were single and responsible for their own livelihood, requiring financial obligation of the individual or the state.

4) A large percentage of the students are experiencing anxiety from low test scores. This shows evidence that the problem must be addressed early in the student's educational experience. There is a need for inservice related to test taking skills.

5) This item reflects the family background of the students participating in the study which has an influence on the dreams for the future and an educational aspiration of an individual.

6) The information derived from this item focused on the reasons for entering a postsecondary institution. It also referred to factors that encouraged the student to remain in school and attain a degree.

7) The information derived from this item focused on individual choices for remaining in school. Even though the participants were allowed to select several categories, the vast majority answered as one of their choices adequate finances as number one. After this subject was addressed, the second highest choice was a better teacher-student rapport.

8) A large percentage of the participants indicated a need for a tutoring program and a need for an improved student conseling program. This identifies the need for a great concentration on meeting students humanistic need.

9) Many of the participants have plans to return to a postsecondary institution, which will help the individual and unfortunately cost the state more money to fund one person's educational effort twice.

10) This item is similar to the above item and the majority of the participants do plan to earn a degree.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Specific newsletters focusing on the humanistic approach to teaching be provided. This will help educators to become cognizant of the importance of professors being sensitive to students' emotional needs.
2. Develop a program to improve the student-teacher relationship, by encouraging students to unite their efforts with that of the school faculty, in order to provide an incentive to enhance the teaching-learning process.
3. Developing a liaison program including the professors, the counselor, and the student providing a network for opened lines of communication with information the student may use as a support system during those critical times in his/her educational experience.
4. The educational system needs curricula that concentrates on alleviating the pressure on students produced by the fear of failure. This has a devastating influence on learning process.
5. Develop an awareness program to enhance positive attitudes and mutual respect among students and the university faculty, to enable higher education to evolve into al it is meant to be.
6. Students should be encouraged to enroll in relevant and meaningful courses. Stereotypes based on tradition should be deleted and course selection should be based on interest, graduation requirements, and usefulness.
7. The university should provide meaningful extra curricula programs for students who are high risk for dropouts. These students should be

encouraged by faculty advisors and university professors to become goal oriented and aware of the procedures to "belong" to a desired group.

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

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This is a completely anonymous questionnaire. It is designed to secure information about student's motivation for pursuing a college degree. Please check (✓) each space considered appropriate to describe your situation.

I. SEX: Male_____ Female_____ II. AGE:_____

III. MARITAL STATUS: Married_____ Divorced_____
Separated_____ Widow or Widower_____
Single_____

IV. DID YOU RECEIVE A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA ?_____ GED_____

PRESENT GRADE POINT AVERAGE._____

V. PARENT'S EDUCATIONAL LEVEL: Mother_____
Father_____

IV. HOW IS YOUR EDUCATION BEING FINANCED?

Self-Employment_____Parents_____CWS_____Pell Grant (BEOG)_____
SEOG_____SSIG_____ SS_____Scholarships_____Voc. Rehab. _____

Other_____

V. COLLEGE MAJOR:_____DEGREE: Bachelor's_____Associate_____

VI. REASON FOR ENTERING POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION:

_____To earn a degree
_____To be with friends
_____Pressure from parents
_____Pressure from society
_____Time is running out and a need to do something with life
_____Unemployment
_____For retraining
_____Socialization
_____Bored
_____Career Opportunity
(R.O.T.C., National Guard, etc.)
_____Personal educational enrichment
_____Improve work skills
_____Improve marketable skills
_____Advancement in existing position
_____Acquire independence
_____Vocational Rehabilitation

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REASONS FOR DECREASE IN MOTIVATIONAL LEVEL.

_____ 1. I never got involved until I was close to attaining my goal - like my junior or senior year.

_____ 2. I could get by with a "C" - and in some courses a "D".

_____ 3. I went from High School to College - school - school - school - too muc school.

_____ 4. College - too much freedom and not enough structure.

_____ 5. Don't make it one semester - can make it in another - retakes.

_____ 6. Neutral or negative attitude toward school.

_____ 7. The work is too difficult (frustration).

_____ 8. Lack of basic skills.

_____ 9. Low self image.

_____ 10. Low career aspirations (I will never be anybody).

_____ 11. Lack of encouragement from home, peers, teachers, etc.

_____ 12. Teachers are too difficult - too hard. Don't understand them.

_____ 13. I am not spending my money to educate myself - someone else's problem. It's not costing me anything.

_____ 14. Don't realize the importance of an education.

_____ 15. My lack of discipline.

_____ 16. Unclear or indecisive or undefined goals or objectives (what I want to do).

_____ 17. Poor attitude.

_____ 18. Personal problems get in the way.

_____ 19. Family problems get in the way.

_____ 20. Feeling of inadequacy to handle new situations.

_____ 21. People expect too much from me (parents and teachers).

_____ 22. Experiences too many failures and too few successes.

_____ 23. Receives little praise and much criticism.

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___ 24. Boredom because work is too easy.

___ 25. Lack of challenging school work.

___ 26. Health or physical deficiencies.

___ 27. It's better than finding a job.

VIII. CHECK FACTORS THAT WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO REMAIN IN SCHOOL AND ATTAIN YOUR DEGREE:

_____Relevant Courses
_____Individualized Instruction
_____Student Input in Curriculum
_____Better Teacher-Student Rapport
_____Effective Counseling
_____Adequate Finances
_____Adequate Intellectual Challenge
_____Caring Attitude of Faculty and Staff
_____Less Restrictive Rules and Regulations
_____Tutoring Program
_____More study sessions made available by Instructors
_____More flexible office hours by Instructors.
_____More Socialization
_____Appropriate Peer-Interaction
_____Quality Teaching

IX. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR CURRICULUM?_____

X. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU BEEN ON:

Academic Probation_____
Academic Suspension_____

XI, HOW MANY CREDIT HOURS ARE YOU PURSUING THIS SEMESTER?_____

XII. ARE YOU TAKING OR HAVE TAKEN DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES?_____